

Theodore Roosevelt Junior High School
6th Avenue and 14th Street
Fourth Ward Neighborhood
Altoona
Blair County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5852

HABS
PA
7-ALTO,
73-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HABS
PA.
7-ALTO,
73-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
THEODORE ROOSEVELT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

HABS No. PA-5852

Location: 6th Avenue & 14th Street

Date of Erection: 1922-24

Architect: Julian Millard

Description: This building is quite striking in spite of a few alterations to doors and windows. Because the walls paralleling the avenues are only slightly longer than those which parallel the streets, the building gives the impression of being square. The building has a skeleton of steel and reinforced concrete infilled with tapestry brick. The structure is three stories high above a full basement.

The building was designed to face Emerson Elementary School and the Lincoln Building. Although these two structures have since been razed, the north facade of Roosevelt is still the obvious focal point. The brick and limestone cornice in a Classical Revival style includes tablets with the date of construction "1923," molded limestone torches standing guard over the shield from the Pennsylvania state seal, and the images of a sailing ship, a plow and a harvest of wheat. Below a beltcourse on the north facade are the words "Letters, Art and Science" in symmetrically spaced limestone panels. Pedimented columns with a molded limestone panel displaying an open book introduce the front entrances. Unfortunately, the original doors have been replaced with solid metal doors which have been painted a very dark brown. Small porticos at each entrance have been rebuilt with red brick. The east and west sides of the front facade display a diamond pattern in the brickwork.

The west wall along 7th Avenue has entrances on the north and south ends. Above replacement doors are original hoods and brackets. Except for infill of glass block in the basement windows and some infill of brick in upper-story windows, the west facade retains most of its original features.

The south and east walls have both received treatments that greatly detract from the original design. Many of the windows on the south facade have been infilled with red brick. A rectangular metal bay encompassing the width of several windows protrudes from the left side of the second floor. There are no entrances in this end of the building. The east facade has entrances near its north and south ends. They are similar to the ones on the west side. Polychrome bricks have been used as infill for all of the basement windows on the east side along 6th Avenue.

The interior retains many of its original features and much original fabric. The auditorium occupies the center of the building and seats about 1,865. Corridors surround the auditorium on all four sides. There are sixty classrooms on the four floors of the 6th Avenue side of the building. In addition, there are specialty rooms on each floor. The basement contains shop rooms and the boys' gymnasium while the girls' gymnasium is on the first floor. Rooms for art, music, science, domestic science, household arts, and the library are on the second and third floors. The third floor also contains a large cafeteria in the rear. The school offices are located on the first floor, between the two entrances.

History: Planning for the first junior high school in Altoona probably began about 1920 when enrollment had reached a point where overcrowding became a critical issue. School board officials decided to erect a junior high school that would bring together seventh- and eighth-grade students from grade schools and ninth-grade students from the high school to alleviate space problems at both levels.

The board considered many sites, including the space now occupied by the 1929 High School Annex, before deciding on the 1500 block of 6th Avenue. The site was residential, at the time having twenty-one dwellings, two brick stables, a frame garage and a confectionery store. The school district purchased the property for a total of \$146,950.

Excavation of the site began in July 1922 and was closely followed in October of that year by the contract for the

THEODORE ROOSEVELT JUNIOR HIGH
SCHOOL
HABS No. PA-5852 (Page 2)

erection of the new building designed by Altoona architect Julian Millard. Millard left Altoona to accept the newly created position of state architect at Harrisburg while the school was under construction. Total contracted cost for the building--including excavation, foundation, construction, heating, plumbing, and wiring--amounted to more than \$1 million.

The building was dedicated "with suitable ceremony," which made use of the new school's large pipe organ. The school opened its doors for classes in September 1924.

Sources: Maps: 1882, 1888, 1894, 1909, 1932, 1951. City directories. Tax assessment records. Deed books: E/446, 149/429, 1122/941. Altoona Mirror files on education & public schools.

Project Information: This report was part of a larger project to document the city of Altoona, Pennsylvania. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), Robert Kapsch, chief, at the request of America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP), Randy Cooley, director. Overviews of the history of the city (HABS No. PA-5784) and the fourth ward neighborhood (HABS No. PA-5786) provide context for these buildings as well as a comprehensive list of sources. See also additional HABS reports on buildings in the city and other neighborhoods.

This report was prepared by Nancy Spiegel in the summer of 1989 under the supervision of HABS senior historian Alison K. Hoagland and Kim E. Wallace, supervisory historian. Nancy Spiegel's and other project historians' work was published as Railroad City: Four Historic Neighborhoods in Altoona, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1990), edited by Kim E. Wallace, supervisory historian, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.